

Wow!

These People Really Know
What They're Doing!

by David Rothschild

F&B

Guests are always checking out your restaurants — at all hours of the day. Often without even realizing it, they're sizing-up your operation. Diners study menus posted outside the restaurant for possible dining choices and hours of operation. Sometimes they'll peek in through a window or opening from the casino. Other times, they'll walk in to take a look around and ask to see a menu. Within the first few seconds, they'll have formed a general impression.

Some things they'll notice that can make a positive or negative impact include:

- * Are your menu and hours clearly posted?
- * Is the restaurant fully set up even if it's not open for business? It should be. Restaurants don't show well when they're not set.
- * Is the theme obvious?
- * Does the restaurant appear to be sparkling clean and inviting?
- * Is the greeter friendly, helpful and dressed appropriately for the concept?
- * Are menus clean and not showing signs of wear? Were they proofread before printing? Spelling errors on a menu are a sign, to some guests, that attention to detail is not a priority.
- * When I drop by a restaurant just prior to opening, it's a very positive sign to see a pre-shift meeting in progress. This indicates to me that the restaurant is practicing a policy of continuing education for the staff and concern for the guests' dining experience.

If a reservation is made by phone, the person answering should pick up by the third ring, with a "smile in his or her voice." When reviewing your reservations policy, consider:

- Are your guests made to feel special and thanked for making a reservation?
- Does your "reservationist" enquire about special requests or special occasion celebrations?

When guests arrive, they'll notice the overall maintenance and appearance of the restaurant. In addition to the list provided in my August article, "Take A Fresh Look At Your Restaurant," here are a few other important things to note:

- Is the kitchen clean? (Yes, guests can often see into the kitchen.)
- Is every table aligned with the others?
- Do the tabletops throughout the restaurant all look identical?
- Are there crumbs or other debris on the seats or benches?

Staff appearance, body language and personal hygiene are key indicators of an operation's professionalism. We recently mystery shopped a property where all the servers were in proper uniform. However, some had their shirt sleeves rolled up; some wore their aprons folded over in half, some full length.

Other service staff issues to consider:

- Is hair constrained?
- Is makeup appropriate?
- Are shoes polished?
- Collars and cuffs clean and unfrayed?
- Is anyone chewing gum?
- Are servers sneezing or coughing into their hands?

Then there's the general tone of the restaurant:

- Do the servers seem to be enjoying their jobs?
- Are they smiling?
- Enthusiastic?
- Do you sense camaraderie and teamwork?

Use of beverage trays signals skilled, professional service:

- All beverages should be carried to the table on a tray. No exceptions.



- No carrying beverages in a "triangle," using both hands.
- No using check sleeves as a makeshift tray.
- All beverages should be served directly from the tray.
- No placing trays on the guests' table or an adjacent table to serve. This is a sure sign of an unskilled amateur. If your servers aren't confident in their tray-carrying abilities, they need to practice.
- Beverage glasses need to be handled hygienically, with fingers below the lip-line and never inside the glass.
- Glasses should be refilled before they are half-empty. (Or half-full, if you're an optimist!)

Guest interaction, order-taking and service

- Does the service team use dining-room-appropriate language when interacting with guests? Remember: Females aren't "You guys," and "No problem" isn't the same as "You're welcome." This is especially important with older guests who are used to more traditional service.
- Has the server taken charge of the table?
- Is the server comfortable with the menu? Can he describe an item and make it sound so good that the guest wants to order it?
- Is he familiar with the day's specials? When I ask a server what the special is and he replies, "Let me check," I know I'm in for a long evening.
- Is food delivered to the person who ordered it, or is it auctioned off — "Who gets the cheeseburger?"

Proper clearing and bussing is another hallmark of a professional restaurant.

- Bus carts are never brought to the table; dishes are always brought to the bus cart.
- Dishes should be hand-carried or loaded onto empty banquet trays. (If using this technique, make sure the servers are using tray jacks and not clearing directly to a hand-held banquet tray.)
- Beverage trays should be used to clear glasses and smallwares.
- Tables should be continuously cleared and maintained throughout the meal.

Coffee and dessert service is one of the last impressions we leave with our guests.

- Coffee and dessert should be served at approximately the same time. This is especially important if you're serving a specialty beverage like cappuccino or espresso, or any liquor-based coffee.
- Coffee needs to be freshly brewed and steaming hot.

Proper check presentation is extremely important.

- A guest doesn't want to have to run down a server in order to ask for his check. When he wants his check, he wants his check.
- Guest checks should be ready for presentation following dessert service.
- Always use a check sleeve or doily-topped plate.
- Let the guest know if you'll service the check or if he should bring it to the cashier.

And one last, put-you-over-the-top way to exude professionalism: management interaction.

- Is there an obvious managerial presence in the dining room?
- Does the manager "touch" each table at least once during the meal?
- Does he monitor and correct service? Is there instruction going on?
- Does he handle any complaints or concerns quietly, politely and away from the table?

I recommend using this article as a checklist. Go through each item now, then refer back to the list often. Ask others to use this checklist and give you their honest feedback. Attention to these details by you and your staff will have your guests saying, "Wow! They really know what they're doing!" **NAC**

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